

MEMORANDUM

TO: Cape Elizabeth Town Council
FROM: Conservation Committee
DATE: August 26, 2019
SUBJECT: RP permitting for minor Greenbelt improvements

The Town of Cape Elizabeth Conservation Committee is the steward of the Town Greenbelt Trail systems and has a long history of improving town managed trails via the implementation of bridges and boardwalks, reroutes, and other measures. These trail improvements are put in place to mitigate environmental impacts in high use areas. As the town Greenbelt Trail network has grown in size and quality, the popularity of the trail system has also increased, leading to additional areas that need improvement.

Projects completed by the Conservation Committee generally fall into two categories: (1) minor improvements to existing trails (defined as having a ground contact footprint <1,000 square feet) and (2) major projects including new trails, machine rehabilitation, and the placement of large boardwalks or bridges totaling >1,001 sq. ft.

The current process for improving town open space via minor projects typically takes 3-9 months from inception to execution and generally follows the steps presented below:

1. Discussion of need at Conservation Committee meeting;
2. Review of applicable permitting by Town Planner;
3. Discussion of permitting requirements at forthcoming Conservation Committee meeting (typically 30-60 days later).
4. Permit application by Town Planner and/or town's engineering consultant;
5. Permit review by Planning Board;
6. Discussion of approval or denial at forthcoming Conservation Committee meeting/schedule work;
7. Implementation of trail improvement.

The cost to the taxpayers of Cape Elizabeth (funded in the Conservation Committee budget) for a minor project is largely spent on administrative functions and typically includes 25 hours (estimate) town staff time plus \$1,500 (est) for a simple permit by rule application from the town's engineering consultant totaling an estimated \$3,300. The cost for major projects is variable depending on the scope of work.

Simplifying the administrative process for minor improvements would greatly increase the speed in which improvements could be implemented which then decreases the environmental damage that can occur. Simplifying the process would also decrease taxpayer cost and improve the greenbelt user experience.

Implementing a process where certain types of projects are pre-approved by the Conservation Committee and Planning Board would greatly improve the ability of the Town to proactively manage the greenbelt system as a resource.

Recommendation

At the August 13, 2019 meeting, the Conservation Committee voted 5-0 to recommend to the Town Council to include reduced permitting for public greenbelt trails when Comprehensive Plan recommendation 48 is considered.